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Apus pacificus in the Seychelles

by C. J. Feare

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Since 1972 swifts have been recorded in small numbers in the Seychelles and Amirantes. These have included several records of black swifts, presumed to be *Apus apus*, which species has been confirmed from specimens on Aldabra (Benson & Penny 1971, Frith 1974). There is also a record of *A. affinis*, one or two individuals having been seen in company with the indigenous *Collocalia elaphra* at Seychelles College, Mahe on 31 December 1972 (personal observations with D. E. B. Lloyd and J. High).

In addition, there have been 24 sightings of larger white-rumped swifts whose identity was obscure. From 1972 to 1976 I obtained descriptions of several individuals, sometimes seen in company with black swifts and in May 1978 I photographed two individuals on Bird Island, Seychelles. These photographs are deposited at the Museum of Zoology, Cambridge University.

All the birds were characterised by being largely dark with broad white rumps, pale chins and moderately forked tails. Two birds seen on Bird Island, Seychelles, in May 1978 at close range (c. 20 m with 8 x 30 binoculars) were black above but slightly paler below. These individuals were frequently seen in company with a Mascarene Martin *Phedina borbonica* and were estimated to be two-and-a-half to three times the size of this bird. When seen with black swifts they have appeared similar in size, larger, or slightly smaller (once). The extent of the pale chin was variable, ranging from an indistinct white chin patch, similar to some black swifts, to a larger more diffuse pale chin extending with mottling on to the upper breast. One individual had a white mark on the lower belly.

Behaviour was generally similar to black swifts, although on several occasions the wing beats of the white-rumped birds appeared noticeably slower and more laboured. The May 1978 birds, together with the *P. borbonica*, were notable in flying low over the beach and *Sterna fuscata* colony after 18.45 h when it was almost dark.

The photographs have been examined by C. W. Benson, R. K. Brooke and I. Sinclair. Brooke and Sinclair both commented that the birds were not an African species of swift. The photographs and descriptions do, however, fit the nominate race of *Apus pacificus*, the Pacific White-rumped Swift, an identification that I had tentatively proposed in 1972. Brooke and Sinclair had not seen *A. pacificus* alive and could not, therefore, confirm that the photographs were of this species, but Brooke (*in litt.* to Benson) commented that he was sure "from the evidence now available that *A. pacificus* is a regular but scarce visitor to the Seychelles". After examining skins, Benson agreed that the photographs and descriptions referred "in all probability" to nominate *A. pacificus*, and I am now confident that this is the correct identification.

A. p. pacificus is characterised by having a moderately forked tail, a broad white rump and being black apart from a pale chin and pale tips to feathers

on the ventral surface (Lack 1956). These pale tips are visible only at very close range, but the mottled upper breasts of some of the Seychelles birds and the white mark on the lower belly of one may have been due to these feather edgings. The two other races, *kanoi* and *leuconyx* can be excluded on account of their smaller size and narrow white rumps: *kanoi* is furthermore confined to southeastern Tibet (Dement'ev & Gladkov 1966), while *leuconyx* does occur, though unpredictably, in India (Ali & Ripley 1970).

A. p. pacificus breeds in eastern Asia and migrates, wintering in Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia (Dement'ev & Gladkov 1966). It also occurs as a winter migrant or wanderer in parts of eastern Bangladesh (Ali & Ripley 1970) and it has been recorded in the Phillipines, New Zealand and Macquarie Island (Rabor *et al.* 1970, Falla *et al.* 1966, Watson 1975). The 22 sightings in the Seychelles (10 on Bird Island, 11 on Frigate Island and 1 on Ilot Fregate) and 2 in the Amirantes, therefore represent a considerable western extension of the known range.

The seasonal distribution of records (6 in May, 4 in October and 14 in November) suggests that the Pacific White-rumped Swift is a passage migrant in the Seychelles and Amirantes. However, such a suggestion proposes an hitherto unknown wintering area for (?) small numbers of these swifts in Madagascar or Africa.

Frith (1974) reported sight records of the Mottled Spinetail *Telacanthura ussberi* on Aldabra in December 1972 and January 1973. Of the 22 Seychelles records of *A. pacificus*, 15 were in October and November 1972. Frith identified his birds on the basis of their white rumps and square tails, 2 of the birds also showing white vents. One of the Seychelles *A. pacificus* had a white mark on the lower belly (? = white vent), and these swifts could appear square-tailed when moulting their tail feathers. The highly migratory *A. pacificus*, since it occurs perhaps more regularly than so far recorded in the Seychelles and Amirantes, would be much more likely to reach Aldabra than the non-migratory *T. ussberi* of East Africa.

A further white-rumped swift was seen by A. Cheke (pers. comm.) on 28 June 1974 from a ship anchored off Agalega. He considered that this bird was *A. borus*, on account of the tail shape (incurved outer tail feathers: Cheke had noted this feature in Ethiopia) but commented (*in litt.*) that Agalega was an unlikely place to find this species, which is a local resident and partial migrant in East Africa (Williams 1963). *A. pacificus* now seems a more likely alternative.

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Remarks on specimens, holotype, description and subspecies of *Chlorophonia flavirostris* Sclater

by J. Ingels

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The genus *Chlorophonia* consists of 4 species of small, sexually dimorphic tanagers. However, sexes should be alike, or nearly so, in the juvenal and first basic (sub-adult) plumages for all 4 species (Skutch 1954).

C. flavirostris, confined to the Colombian-Pacific region (Meyer de Schauensee, pers. comm.), was first described by Sclater (1861, 1886), but little has been published since (Gyldenstolpe 1941, Blake 1959, Hilty 1977). These notes based mainly upon the existing study material, add substantial information to the general knowledge of this tanager.

Specimens

I have been able to locate 19 mounted birds and study skins of *C. flavirostris*; 5 are housed in a private collection and 14 in public or scientific institutions. Exact collecting locality data are known for 6 skins only.

In the following list, for specimens collected in the wild, data, as far as available, are given in the following order: institution which cares for the skin, collection number, sex, author (if any) who first recorded the skin, locality and year of collection and the collector.

England: British Museum (Natural History) (BMNH), Tring: 1885.6.12.23, ♀ (?), holotype, described by Sclater (1861), collected in Ecuador. Sclater's guess that the type came from the eastern slope of the Andes is probably in error, since all specimens with locality data are from the western slope (Storer in Peters 1970); 1925.12.24.615, ♀, collected at Mindo, W. Ecuador, in January 1914 by W. Goodfellow.

Sweden: Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet, Stockholm (NHRS): 1919.08.20.3001, ♀, mentioned by Gyldenstolpe (1914), collected below Gualea, W. Ecuador, 20 August 1919 by L. Söderström.

United States: Chicago Natural History Museum (CNHM), Chicago: 251021, ♀, described as a subspecies *C. f. minima* by Blake (1959), collected near La Guayacana, Nariño, S. Colombia, 20 February 1958 by K. von Schneidern; Louisiana State University Museum of Zoology (LSUMZ), Baton Rouge: 60801, immature ♂, taken at Alto Yunda near La Cascada (Anchicaya Valley), Valle, S. Colombia, 11 June 1975 by S. L. Hilty; Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia (PANS): 173498, ♀; 173499, ♂, both collected 27 May 1973 and 173500, immature ♂, collected 21 May 1973; all collected near the same locality as the LSUMZ specimen, by S. L. Hilty. The LSUMZ and PANS specimens have been recorded by the collector (Hilty 1977).

Denmark: an unsexed specimen acquired in 1909 by the Universitets Zoologisk Museum, Copenhagen, has disappeared from the museum's systematic collection (Fjeldså pers. comm.). R. W. Storer (pers. comm.) called my attention to this skin, which he saw when preparing the section on tanagers in Peters (1970).

The skins of 5 ♂♂, 1 ♀, 2 imm ♂♂ and 2 unsexed specimens, which had been imported alive into the United States and Denmark for zoological or private collections and which were preserved after death, are listed below. Data are given in the following order: country of importation, sex, previous zoological or private collection where the birds were exhibited alive and present owner of the skins.